

Students die in auto accident

Valerie Lopez, a senior speech communications major from Weslaco, and Billy James York, a Blinn College student and a student last year at A&M, died in an automobile accident Sunday.

The two were returning to College Station from Weslaco when the accident occurred, University Relations associate director Mary Jo Powell said.

Funeral services for Lopez were held yesterday at 2 p.m. in Weslaco. Service information for York was not available.

HEALTH BRIEFS

Product can prevent poison ivy dermatitis

If enjoying an outdoor picnic or campout, be aware of poison ivy.

Poison ivy may cause itching skin lesions after contact with the plant oil. The rash persists for two or more weeks.

Poison ivy, oak and sumac may grow as a vine, shrub or small tree. The three leaves on each stem may be green or turn red as they mature.

Wear long sleeves and gloves for protection. Wash off any contact within 10 minutes of known exposure.

Do not stay at home to avoid poison ivy. A new product called Ivy Block can prevent poison ivy dermatitis.

This product forms a barrier against the plant's sap. A prescription is not needed to purchase the product. The active ingredient is an organoclay that has been used in the cosmetic industry for years with a good safety record.

To check with a doctor, call 845-6111 to schedule an appointment at Beutel Health Center.

— Contributed by Dr. Don Freeman, M.D., at the A.P. Beutel Health Center

Exams help detect testicular cancer

Testicular cancer is the most frequent malignancy in men between the ages of 15 and 35. Although not common among all men, it has a significant impact on this age group.

Testicular self-examination (TSE) remains the best tool for early detection. However, public awareness of the disease remains low, and the average delay in diagnosis is four to six months.

TSE should be done each month. The best time is after a warm bath or shower, when the scrotal skin is most relaxed. Roll each testicle gently between the thumb and first two fingers of both hands. If you feel any lumps, nodules or hard places, see a doctor.

If you think you are feeling the epididymis (the "cap" on top of and running down the back of the testicle), feeling the same thing on the other testis may confirm that it is the epididymis. If you are not sure, see a doctor.

To check with a doctor, call 845-6111 to schedule an appointment at Beutel Health Center.

— Contributed by Dr. Janet Krueger, M.D., of the A.P. Beutel Health Center.

Grant program allows for school choice

TEA hopes to make transferring from low-performing institutions easier

AUSTIN (AP) — Thousands more students are eligible to transfer out of low-performing public schools under a change in state law, but they may still have nowhere to go.

The Texas Education Agency has heard from parents who want to use the revamped public education grant program but have not been able to find a school district that will take the transfers, TEA spokeswoman Debbie Graves Ratcliffe said.

While public school districts may still be deciding what to do, Mrs. Ratcliffe said, "I think it's just creating a lot of frustration out there." A number of school districts say they do not have room or resources for transfer students.

Senate Education Committee Chairman Teel Bivins, R-Amarillo, said Wednesday he hopes school districts will begin accepting transfers as they learn more about the program and the monetary incentives it offers for taking the students.

"The goal is to increase choice for parents and students in public education," said Bivins, who pushed expansion of the PEG program in this year's legislative session with Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Laredo.

Both lawmakers said they want to monitor how the program works between now and the 1999 legislative session. If public schools don't accept PEG transfers, Cuellar said, one option would be to start allowing private schools to take them. That idea didn't muster enough support for passage this year.

The PEG program was enacted in 1995 to give students a way out of public schools that fall below certain standards on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, a statewide test.

In the 1995-96 school year, 491,005 students from 652 campuses were eligible under the program. But only 31 students received the transfers, mostly because many school districts won't take the students.

Mrs. Ratcliffe said the agency doesn't keep records of how many requests were made.

Private schools are not included in the program. This year's measure makes more students eligible for the transfer program; requires school districts to notify parents that their children are eligible and give them information about the program; and gives schools financial incentives to take the transfers.

The law still allows schools to reject transfers. There are 1,153 school campuses — out of

6,643 in Texas — that are considered poor enough performers under the new law to qualify for the PEG program. Nearly 800,000 students are at those campuses, out of 3.7 million Texas school children.

Under the expanded law, students are eligible to transfer if they are assigned to a campus at which 50 percent or more of the students did not pass the TAAS in any two of the preceding three years.

They also are eligible if their campuses have been rated low-performing in any of the preceding three years under the state accountability system.

Under the accountability system, a school was rated low-performing last year if less than 30 percent of its students — or any category of students, such as blacks or whites — passed the TAAS.

Mrs. Ratcliffe said the agency has received dozens of calls, mostly from parents.

"Some have called to get more information about the program and how to participate in it. Some have called back when they found that after calling school districts in their areas, they couldn't find anyone who was accepting PEG transfers," she said.

Company owes Texans \$80 million in electricity refund

AUSTIN (AP) — More than 2 million Texans are getting a small break on their summer electricity bills and could be in line for more refunds later this year.

The Texas Public Utility Commission on Wednesday ordered Texas Utilities Electric Co. to refund \$80 million to 2 million residential customers.

The Dallas-based company provided electricity in north Texas.

The refund is a result of negotiations between TU, the PUC and the Office of Public Utility Counsel, a state office that argues utility issues for consumers.

TU said it was making more money than allowed by the commission.

In addition to the refund, the commission agreed to delay any TU rate cuts next year.

The refunds will amount to roughly \$152 per customer, credited toward August bills. Jim Lawrence, a TU spokesman, said the refund bills in August average \$152, making the refund an 11 percent credit.

LOBBYIST

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Woodford said government officials must work to improve their ethics.

"Some lobbyists leave their credit card at a restaurant for their legislator to use freely, and they don't have to sit through the dinner," she said. "It became a trough for them. Then the lobbyists or PACs (political action committees) expect them to vote for their cause."

Woodford said conflicts of interest have been prevalent in government for years. She said some legislators cannot live on their \$7,200-a-year salary from the state, so they pursue other jobs. It is these jobs, she said, that sometimes create a conflict of interest when legislators deal with contracts and bills.

"Campaign finance reform and ethics — you've got to have them both," she said.

Woodford said Common Cause Texas' greatest disappointment of this year's session was the killing of a revision of the Open Meetings Act bill. The bill proposed preventing legislators from having briefings behind closed doors. Legislators said private briefings do not violate the Open Meetings Act because no deliberation happens during such meetings.

Although the bill was killed, Woodford said her organization has succeeded in getting other issues in legislation passed.

"The Ethics Reform Bill was a major victory," she said. "The Texas

Ethics Commission has just begun, and we are making headway on important issues."

Judicial campaign finance reform is another area where Common Cause Texas has succeeded, Woodford said. In the past, law firms contributed money to judges, and those judges were making decisions in favor of the contributors. Judges and all county officials are required to file financial disclosures, such as income tax returns and their main source of income, with the County Clerk beginning Sept. 1. This applies to counties with a population of 50,000 or more.

Karen Howard, a Bryan resident and a librarian, said she is glad Common Cause Texas stands up for citizens' rights.

"It makes me feel good to know that there is an organization that is not out to get my money," Howard said. "Someone has to say something. Our government needs help."

Woodford said the government should not be allowed to take away something that does not belong to it.

"We want to protect what the taxpayers pay for," Woodford said. "We have to battle to preserve victories won in the past."

Common Cause Texas is a national nonpartisan citizens' lobbying organization. Its goal is to promote integrity and openness at all levels of government and to make public officials more accountable and responsive to citizens.

Common Cause Texas has more than 7,500 members statewide and a state office in Austin.

MIR

Continued from Page 1

"We expect to reach the final agreement next Tuesday," said Valery Ryumin, deputy mission control chief. "But we have agreed to start work. We should move ahead."

Should the two sides agree, the prospect of an American astronaut pitching in on repairs to a Russian spaceship would seem to take international cooperation in space to new heights.

Russian officials are clearly turning to their American partners out of desperation.

The two Russian cosmonauts on

the Mir, Alexander Lazutkin and mission commander Vasily Tsibilyev, were to carry out repairs this weekend to return the spacecraft to nearly full power.

On Monday, Tsibilyev began complaining of an irregular heartbeat. On Wednesday, Vladimir Solovyov, chief of Russia's Mission Control, said space controllers had decided that the Mir commander was unfit for the difficult repair job, expected to take four to five hours in a bulky spacesuit.

"As the commander has medical problems, we have decided that he shouldn't take part," he said. "As a brave man, he's distressed about that. But you can't give orders to your heart."

CAMPUS CALENDAR

Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
<p>The Writing Center (Dept. of English, Texas A&M): The Writing Center in 249 Blocker will consult with any TAMU student who needs help with his or her writing projects for Summer II. Hours are 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Come by or call 862-4181 for more information.</p>	<p>Aggie Roadrunners: There will be a daily run of 2-3 miles beginning at 7 p.m. in front of G. Rollie White. Runners of all levels are encouraged to attend. For more information call Hank Bullinger at 821-6339.</p>	<p>Texas A&M Women's Rugby: There will be practice from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the TAMU Rugby Field. No experience is necessary. For more information contact Wendy at 696-9012.</p>	<p>TAMU Chess Club: The TAMU Chess Club will be playing chess in 308 Rudder from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. For more information contact Scott Griggs at 696-3879 or griggs@myriad.net.</p>	<p>The Writing Center (Dept. of English, Texas A&M): The Writing Center in 249 Blocker will consult with any TAMU student who needs help with his or her writing projects for Summer II. Hours are 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Come by or call 862-4181 for more information.</p>	<p>Texas A&M Women's Rugby: There will be practice from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the TAMU Rugby Field. No experience is necessary. For more information contact Wendy at 696-9012.</p>

WEATHER OUTLOOK

SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
<p>Thunderstorms High: 99° Low: 75°</p>	<p>Partly Cloudy High: 99° Low: 75°</p>	<p>Partly Cloudy High: 97° Low: 75°</p>

Sketch



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